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SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 09: UNDERSTANDING ANDHRA PRADESH: DEFYING  
PUNDITS AND EXIT POLLS

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11. SUMMARY: With voter turnout in Andhra Pradesh (AP) significantly higher than the national average, the Congress party defied the exit polls to increase its huge margin in the Lok Sabha delegation from the state and win a simple majority in the state assembly. The emergence of two new parties and a new matrix of caste politics appear to be decisive factors in this election. There is some indication that voters split their vote, casting their ballot for one party in the parliamentary contest and for a different party in the state assembly election. This voting pattern represents a change in voter behavior and bodes watching in the future to see whether it is a one off or a trend. END SUMMARY.

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Congress Victorious: A Surprising Reprise  
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12. No political analyst expected either a voter turnout of 72 percent (15 percent higher than the national average) or the Congress party to reprise its remarkable victory of 2004 - when it upset the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) to capture both the state government and 29 Lok Sabha seats, the largest Congress contingent of MPs from any state. Still Congress Chief Minister (CM) Y S Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR) never wavered from his prediction that in the 2009 concurrent national and state elections his party would increase its national tally to 34 Lok Sabha seats and that he would remain CM after Congress candidates won 230 of the 295 seats in the Legislative Assembly. After the votes were counted on May 16, it became obvious that YSR knew the pulse of the people better than any analyst. Overcoming the traditional anti-incumbency factor, he once again 'delivered Andhra Pradesh on a platter.' At the national level the electorate chose Congress candidates for 33 of the state's 42 Lok Sabha seats. The remaining seats were split amongst 4 other parties: TDP - 6, Telangana Rashtra Samathi (TRS) - 2, and the All India Majlis-Ittehadul-Muslimeen (MIM) - 1.

13. At the state level, 156 out of 294 Congress candidates won in their district, which represents a loss of 28 seats for the party. Still, this simple majority gives the Congress the opportunity to form a state government without the necessity of

encumbering alliances. Even though the TDP doubled its seat tally from 46 to 93 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), its 'Grand Alliance' partners fared poorly. The TRS won a mere 10 of the 44 seats it contested (down from 26 in 2004). [NOTE: Political observers also claim that the poor showing of the TRS was the final blow to the Telangana-separatist movement. END NOTE] The media widely described the performance of other members as 'dismal' - the CPI won four seats and the CPI(M) won only a single one versus their previous tallies of six and nine respectively. The new Praja Rajyam party also failed to meet the initially high expectations for the party winning a mere 18 races statewide. Other parties to win seats in the Assembly include, BJP - 2, Lok Satta - 1, Independents - 7.

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Caste in the Central Role  
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¶4. Over the past 50 years, politics in AP has traditionally revolved around two dominant rival castes/party nexuses - the Reddy/Congress and Kamma/TDP combines. However, political analysts observed that caste polarization became even more acute in this election as a third grouping - an alignment of the Kapu and Other Backward Class (OBC) communities - emerged in support of Chiranjeevi's PRP. Other parties are also closely affiliated with caste groups: the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) is closely identified with Velama caste; and both Communist parties have a close affinity with the Kamma community who dominated the parties prior to the birth of the TDP.

¶5. The Reddy community is politically dominant in 15 of the state's 23 districts, including Kurnool, Anantapur and Chittoor in the Rayalaseema region, Nalgonda, Medak, Warangal, Mahbubnagar, Rangareddy, Nizamabad, Karimnagar and Adilabad in the Telangana region, and Nellore, Guntur and Prakasam in

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Coastal Andhra. Academic and media interlocutors point out that from the perspective of caste the emergence of the ideological diverse pre-poll 'Grand Alliance' - consisting of the TDP, TRS, CPI, and CPI(M) - made electoral sense.

¶6. Wherever the PRP's attempt to consolidate the Kapu and OBC vote banks behind a candidate was successful, the reported voter turnout increased. This initiative was so vital to the new party that Chiranjeevi boasted to the CDA about the PRP's decision to put forward 104 OBC nominees for State Assembly seats, almost twice that nominated by rival parties. He claimed that the PRP had upped the ante and the results of this election would force both the Congress and the TDP to also reserve at least 100 seats for OBC candidates in future elections.

¶7. Political analysts also note that the emergence of the PRP altered the standard vote bank equations. Chiranjeevi saw this as the great strength of his party and as the primary reason why all other parties would reach out to him after the vote is counted. Just days before the votes were counted, AP Chief Secretary P. Ramakanth Reddy quipped that 'it's not clear who is cutting into whose vote bank. Everyone draws solace from that and predicts that a high turnout is good for them.'

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Predictions of a Hung Assembly Undone  
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¶8. Prior to the vote count each main party continued to publicly proclaim that they would win an outright majority of seats in the State Legislative Assembly and form the next government. Still, most political analysts believed, and exit polls predicted, that a hung assembly would be the most likely outcome with both Congress and the TDP-led 'Grand Alliance' bagging from 130-140 seats each and the PRP winning 30-40 contests. AP Speaker Suresh Reddy remarked that AP had not seen a three-way race since the 1970's and that this 'triangular contest defied predictions.' TDP leader Naidu was more circumspect noting that after the votes are counted 'it may

still be possible that Congress doesn't have a majority.'

¶9. Naidu's hint of pessimism also foreshadowed events at the national level. The 'Grand Alliance' fractured in its support for the Left-led Third Front even before the vote count. TRS leader K. Chandrashekhara Rao (KCR) publicly called the Third Front a 'fiction' and declared that he would support the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the center in his quest to achieve statehood for the Telangana region. Naidu informed the CDA that the Left parties reacted strongly to the TRS's realignment and suggested that the 'Grand Alliance' drop the TRS at the state level, but he convinced them to temper their reaction until after the vote count as party's support could be crucial to forming a majority there. Naidu wasn't concerned about the TRS move, since KCR's decision to support the NDA at the center precluded the possibility that he would support Congress at the state level.

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The Votes Are Counted: Chiranjeevi Plays the Spoiler  
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¶10. Once the votes were counted it became clear that the YSR-led Congress benefited from the emergence of the PRP. At a post-election party meeting, Naidu claimed that the Congress had not won the election, but that new parties had cost the 'Grand Alliance' crucial anti-Congress votes. He said that split in the oppositions ranks, which the 'Grand Alliance' had tried to overcome, gave the Congress an undisputed victory even though it had received the smallest percentage of votes of any previous state government.

¶11. Throughout the state, the Congress vote bank remained intact while the Telugu Desam lost heavily to the PRP. Even though PRP candidates lost deposits in 22 out of 40 Lok Sabha seats contested, in many key Coastal Andhra constituencies they polled more than 30,000 votes or one third of potential TDP

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voters. A prime example was the Nellore LS constituency where the Congress candidate defeated the TDP candidate by 54,994 votes, while the PRP candidate took third polling more than 138,000 votes. In other constituencies Congress candidates won by thin margins suggesting that the PRP tilted the results (Mummidivaram - 1,851, Bapatla - 1,368, Serlingampalli - 1,330, Rajahmundry City - 1,304, Bodhan - 1,275, Alampur - 1,194, Kollapur - 1,194, Jaggampet - 789, Vijayawada Central - 738, Paderu - 587, Payakaraopet - 656, Nellimarla - 597, Pinapaka - 349, Tiruvur - 265, and Penamaluru - 153). Many pundits are proclaiming the end of the party since it did not live up to initial expectations and only won 17 MLA contests and not a single seat in the Lok Sabha. Still, Chiranjeevi plans to move ahead and look to the next election. Importantly, with almost 15 percent of the vote across the state, Chiranjeevi's party qualifies for recognition and can retain its symbol.

¶12. At the state level, the Praja Rajyam delivered a death blow to the 'Grand Alliance.' Even though the TDP doubled its seat tally from 46 to 93 MLAs, its TRS won a mere 10 of the 44 seats it contested (down from 26 in 2004). [NOTE: Political observers also claim that the poor showing of the TRS was the final blow to the Telangana-separatist movement. END NOTE] The media widely described the performance of other coalition members as 'dismal' - the CPI won four seats and the CPI(M) won only a single one versus their previous tallies of six and nine respectively.

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The Votes Are Counted: Two Players Emerge From the Sidelines  
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¶13. Even as the BJP candidates lost 267 of 269 Legislative Assembly contests and dashed all hope of becoming a 'decisive force' in the state, two smaller parties showed they could significantly impact the final outcome. The MIM not only retained its hereditary Parliamentary seat from Hyderabad, but it emerged as an important 'unofficial' Congress ally. Running

in a secure constituency - Asaduddin Owaisi claimed his seat by securing 110,768 more votes than TDP candidate and Siasat Editor, Zahid Ali Khan - allowed the MIM candidate to campaign 'in favor of the Congress' in several Muslim-populated towns in Telangana and Coastal Andhra. Political analysts widely credit Owaisi with moving Muslim votes to the Congress en masse. This countered the TDP's strategy of distancing the party from prior alliance with the BJP, which Naidu believed was a key factor in the 2004 Congress victory.

¶14. The Lok Satta Party - another new entrant formed by Jayaprakash Narayan, a retired IAS officer turned social and political activist - also had an impressive first showing. Though the party was only victorious in one state Assembly race, it was able to garner significant vote share (over 10 percent) in urban constituencies with its advocacy for clean politics and promises to usher in a new political culture. This favored Congress by cutting into the urban anti-incumbency vote. Importantly, Lok Satta candidates polled more votes than the BJP in all the five Hyderabad constituencies. Elsewhere in the state almost five percent of rural voters voted for the party and political analysts believe it now has a sufficient base of support to build a statewide organization.

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The Votes Are Counted: Splitting Tickets  
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¶15. One question that has caught the attention of media is the disparity between the Congress party's continued dominance in Lok Sabha elections and the simple (but lesser) majority it won in the state. While almost 39 percent of voters cast ballots for the Congress candidate in parliamentary elections, the TDP-led coalition only combined for 34 percent and PRP polled more than 15 percent. [NOTE: The BJP only took 4 percent of the vote and the BSP less than one percent. END NOTE] However, in the Assembly polls, Congress only received 36 percent, the TDP 26 percent, TRS 5 percent, CPI(M) 2 percent, and the CPI 1 percent.

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¶16. Citing the poll numbers most media credited the splintering of the anti-Congress vote between the 'Grand Alliance' and the PRP as the primary factor. However, an academic interlocutor noted that the mismatch could be due to the fact that only the Congress had a national presence and 'agenda' in this concurrent election. For example, in the Visakhapatnam East constituency, the TDP Assembly candidate polled 44,233 votes, but the TDP Lok Sabha candidate only garnered 34,367 votes. Given this interpretation, the three percent gap between the Congress party's parliamentary and Assembly results indicate that some voters split their ballot and voted for continuity at the Center even as they based their Assembly votes on local issues. The Hindu wrote (May 18, 2009) that, 'the fact that 14 [state] ministers have tasted defeat sends a strong message that the voters, intelligent as they are, preferred a national party but are not happy with its functioning at the state.'

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All Support the 1-2-3  
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¶17. Prior to the vote counting both Naidu and Chiranjeevi indicated general, but necessarily unqualified, support for the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement. Chiranjeevi told the CDA that prior to the confidence vote last July, he was approached about his position by some of the sitting MP's who later joined the PRP. He told them he had 'no objection' to the agreement, but that they should cast their votes prior to leaving their parties to join the PRP. Naidu predicted that there would be no change in foreign policy no matter which coalition formed the central government. While he didn't directly voice either reservation or support for the agreement, he did note that the Left parties had a visceral hatred for the previous U.S. administration and then changed tracks to talk

about how even they had had to `fall in line' on issues that promoted development and created wealth that could later be distributed to their constituents.

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Local Politics Carries the Day: Except at the Center  
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¶18. COMMENT: The strong showing by two new parties may indicate that the trend towards coalition governments that include small regional (or in this case sub-regional) parties has started to make its way to the state assembly level. Another trend to emerge is voters splitting their ballot between different parties in national and state contests. No matter how these factors play out in future elections, one constant will remain - local issues, especially development and delivery of social welfare programs, will continue to be the focus of the electorate and, therefore, of the politicians and their promises at election time. As if on cue, immediately after the results were final Congress CM YSR Reddy announced that he would assign top priority for five ongoing irrigation projects in the state.  
END COMMENT.  
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